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ABSTRACT

After 177 college students in 49 groups participated in group tasks, their perceptions of those groups and individuals in the groups were analyzed for gender differences. In the discriminant analysis of the three interpretable factors for perception of groups (group cohesiveness, power, and personality), gender was a predictor of an individual's perception of group climate. Females generally thought the group was cohesive regarding the task, that some individuals exhibited more power than others, and that participants were personable. Males tended to have the opposite viewpoints. Factor analyses of reactions to individual group members produced one interpretable factor, social competence, that accounted for 83% of the variance. When social competence was analyzed by gender, no substantial differences in factor structures were obtained. Both males and females rated females as more socially competent than males. Similar analyses for gender distinctions of task, group composition, and group size did not prove statistically significant. Evidently the type of people participating in the group discussions, not the structure of the situation, was important in deciding reactions to individual group members. (The anomaly of males and females having traditional perceptions for group climate yet undifferentiated perceptions for individuals is discussed.) (RL)

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Gender Differences in Perceptions of Female and Male Co-Interactants

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Psychological differences of gender, like "good art" are something many individuals feel they can identify. As with "good art," most people are unable to explain the basis of their intuitions. A stereotypical image, for example, regarding gender differences is that women do/should engage in relatively non-assertive and non-competitive behavior while men do/should engage in relatively assertive and competitive behavior. Research, however, has failed to confirm such intuitions regarding inherent psychological differences between the sexes.

Still others believe that gender differences may be situation-specific, age-sensitive, or that there may be varying degrees of maleness and femaleness. Contextual variables rather than individual variables are often emphasized. Again, research has failed to confirm such differences.

The study reported here examined individual perceptions based upon the communication occurring among members of a small group. More specifically, two issues were investigated by asking the questions: 1) Do perceptions of a group's climate (i.e., context) vary as a function of gender? 2) Do perceptions of another's personal qualities vary as a function of gender?

BACKGROUND

Reviewing 1,400 research articles published since 1965 on the psychology of sex differences, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974, 3) concluded: "A number of the physical differences between the sexes are obvious and universal. The psychological differences are not. The folklore that has grown up about them is often vague and inconsistent. We believe there is a great deal of myth in the popular views about sex differences." In fact, of thirty-one

studies of same-sex cooperation, using the Prisoner's Dilemma Game, nineteen studies concluded there was no difference between the sexes, seven studies concluded the difference was with male subjects and five studies concluded the difference was with female subjects (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974, 252-253).

Kay Deaux, in her review of the research dealing with men and women, maintained that there are apparently few differences regarding the nature of the sexes. Frequently, she claims, men and women are capable of displaying similar types of behavior. Men and women, conversely, might make different decisions in specific situations. Researchers should consider both the sex and the situation in attempting to understand the nature of men and women. Deaux (1976, 144) emphasizes that "certainly such an analysis is not as simple as the more stereotyped view that 'men are this way' and 'women are that way.' But truth is not necessarily so simple."

Considering the role of sex in the group situation, Jordan and McLaughlin (1976) observed that when functions to be fulfilled in a specific situation are defined ambiguously, people will be perceived primarily on the basis of their sex. Generally, where information concerning others is limited, the significance of gender in those impression forming situations is strong. This underlying dimension recurs in both individual and panel perceptions. (See also: Rosenberg, Nelson, and Vivekananthan, 1968.)

Two related studies by Mabry (1976a; 1976b) also investigated issues relevant to the current discussion. Examining interaction in unstructured

small groups, his results (1976b) provided support for the assertion that women did not display behavior congruent with the more traditional gender stereotypes whereas men did. Mabry's other study (1976a), while not directed toward examining gender differences, supports the contention that the perceived communication climate does fluctuate as a function of the task with which group members are involved. Taken together, these studies indicate that if certain communication differences do exist between genders, such differences might be due to an individual's perceptions of the group's climate.

Studying the import of attitude, task and sex composition on female leadership in small problem-solving groups, Janet Yerby (1972, 168) offered three conclusions about the results of her research. First, the attitudes that group members possess regarding females in leadership roles, along with the sex composition of the group, are more important than the nature of the task in predicting the response group members are likely to afford female leaders. Second, "attitudes toward female role identification and sex composition significantly affect the responses of group members toward the group" (168). Finally, gender alone is a salient factor in significantly influencing results of a leadership situation. In general, attitudes of the source and gender of the receiver of communication substantially influence female leadership in small problem-solving groups.

In addition to the possibility of situation-specific variables confounding studies on gender differences, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974, 356-359) indict existing research as having shifting anchor points for ratings, blatant selective perceptions of raters, unclear definitions of what is

being rated, failure to consider the relationship of sex differences to age, and ignorance of the possibility that sex differences may be greater among certain subgroups of men and women than among others.

The focus of the reported research was upon the perceptions of individuals regarding another's communication. These perceptions entail one's reflection upon both other individuals and the small group situation in which they are involved. Situational variables--such as task group composition, and group size--were examined in relation to gender.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Recent literature and previous research suggest that communication in some contexts varies according to gender. Such research, however, is often deficient in two respects. First, since the literature suggests differences exist, some researchers assume they must exist. (Perhaps others insist they must not exist.) While such opinions are divergent, research results are also conflicting. Second, while communication behaviors have been examined, perceptions by the communicators themselves regarding other communicators have not been fully examined. An impetus for this study was to strive toward overcoming such deficiencies. The study started on the ground floor by asking the following questions.

First, based upon communication among individuals within a small group, do perceptions regarding group climate differ as a function of gender? More specifically, this problem can be examined by answering the following question:

1. Do males and females have different perceptions of the communication climate of a small group?

Second, based upon communication among individuals within a small group, do perceptions regarding another individual differ as a function of gender? More specifically, this problem can be examined by answering the following two questions:

2. Do females make distinctions between males and females in terms of their personal qualities?
3. Do males make distinctions between males and females in terms of their personal qualities?

Methods[1]

Subjects

Subjects were undergraduate students enrolled in introductory communication courses at a large midwestern university. Subjects volunteered for participation in the project in exchange for research credit accruing to their final grades.

Groups

Initially, five-person laboratory groups of varying gender compositions were formed by randomly assigning subjects to composition conditions contingent upon their availability at scheduled research sessions. Attrition resulted in group sizes varying between three and five members. A total of 177 subjects participated in 49 groups.

Each group engaged in two separate task activities. One task required subjects to rank order a list of statements as to the interpersonal competency reflected by an act alluded to in each statement. A second task focused on a personnel problem related to the communication behavior of an office secretary. Groups were permitted to deliberate for twenty minutes on each

task before rendering a written decision or solution. Task order was randomized across groups.

Procedures and Instruments

Students sat in a circle. They were given a brief introduction and also told that they were being audio-tape recorded. A task was assigned to the group and they were requested to obtain a written solution within twenty minutes. After the allotted time expired, the tape recorder was turned off and subjects responded to several questionnaires. The focus of the reported research is only upon the third and fourth questionnaires. The questionnaires included: (1) reactions to the discussion task (3 questions); (2) reactions to group members, part 1 (4 questions requiring individuals to rank-order all other group members on several personal qualities); (3) reactions to group members, part 2 (10 semantic differential scales focusing upon each other group member individually); and, (4) a group description form (27 questions). Anonymity was insured by having students refer to a posted seating number when answering questions that pertained to specific persons. This procedure was then repeated for a second task. The entire session was approximately one hour in duration.

RESULTS

Group Description Form

The Group Description Form[2] contains 27 questions calling for individuals to describe their perceptions as to how the group is generally structured. To reduce the complexity of this data, a principle axes factor analysis was undertaken (eigenvalue $\geq$ 1.00; communality estimates were squared multiple correlation coefficients) using a varimax rotation

to simple structure. This was accomplished using the SPSS computer program, FACTOR: PA2 (Nie et al., 1975).

The analysis yielded four interpretable factors. Items were retained here if the regression weight was greater than .45; Thurstone's criteria for simple structure were also followed (Rummel, 1970, 386-387). The first factor consisted of four items relating to sharing responsibility and working together toward the task. This factor, accounting for 37.5% of the variance, was labeled "Task-Cohesiveness." Factor II contained three items and accounted for 15.7% of the variance. Referring to the fact that some individuals in the group seemed to control the discussion, this factor was called "Power." Factor III also contained three items. These scales reflected friendliness, sociability, and informality. The third factor was then labeled "Personalness." Finally, a fourth factor consisted of two items relating directly to one's participatory "Involvement" with the task; hence the appropriate label was attached. Moreover, factors III and IV accounted for, respectively, 14.5% and 10.1% of the variance. (See Table 1 and Table 2.)

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Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

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An additional procedure seems noteworthy. Since differences between sexes is of concern here, the data were also submitted to identical analyses according to gender. No substantial differences in factor structures were obtained. The only variations which occurred were slight differences in the weighting of regression coefficients; such fluctuations

were minor. The data were then combined for further analysis by computing composite factor scores. Factor scores were obtained by summing individual variable scores into one total composite score. Reliability estimates were obtained by calculating Pearson-r split-half correlation coefficients; reliability coefficients ranged from .37 to .76 ($p < .001$) after correction with the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula (Ebel, 1965).

A discriminant analysis was then performed. Such an analysis was undertaken for purposes of determining whether a person could be classified as male/female based upon his/her perceptions of a group's climate. For purposes of classification, the dependent variable was gender and the independent variables were task-cohesiveness, power, personalness, and involvement. The analysis was accomplished using the SPSS computer porgram, DISCRIM (Nie, et al., 1975). Other variables, such as task and group structure, were not considered at this point in the analysis.

Since there are only two groups (male or female), only one discriminant function is possible. The chi-square value (23.68277) was statistically significant ($df = 4$; $p < .001$). Using Cooley and Lohnes (1971) suggestion that discriminant function coefficients be greater than .30, there were three substantial discriminant weights. The three interpretable variables were task-cohesiveness, power and personalness. Results for males and females, moreover, were different. Since the standardized discriminant function coefficients had negative values and the female group centroid had a negative value, their relationship was positive. Females evidently thought the group was cohesive regarding the task, that some individuals exhibited more power (or influence) than others, and also felt that people were personable. Since the male group centroid was positive, however, this relationship with the three stated variables was negative. Males evidently

thought the group was not particularly cohesive, that most individuals had relatively equal influence, and also felt that people were not very personable. Moreover, males felt slightly more strongly about their views than females did about their respective views. (Results are summarized in Table 3.)

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Insert Table 3 about here

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Classification results indicated that 63.4% of the cases were correctly classified (Chi-square = 25.102, $p < .001$). While such results were statistically significant, they were not particularly substantial. Initial probability levels, for example, are 50% regarding a dichotomous classification. (See Table 4.)

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Insert Table 4 about here

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Reactions to Group Members

The ten scale Likert-format questionnaire entitled "Reactions to Group Members (Part II)" was factor-analyzed using procedures and criteria discussed in the previous section. One factor was interpretable. The factor contained six items representing the following personal qualities: diplomatic, industrious, intelligent, has realistic ideas, drives self, and uses good judgment. This factor was labeled social "Competence" and accounted for 83.0% of the variance. (See Table 5.)

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Insert Table 5 about here

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The data were, again, submitted to identical analyses according to gender. No substantial differences in factor structures were obtained. The data were then combined for further analysis by computing a composite factor score. Factor scores were obtained by summing individual variable scores into one total composite score. After correction with the Spearman-Brown formula, the split-half reliability estimate was .78.

Two discriminant analyses were then performed using procedures and criteria discussed in the previous section. In both cases, competence was the independent variable and sex of the person being rated was the dependent variable. Analyses, however, were also differentiated according to the gender of the rater.

The first analysis was statistically significant (Chi-square = 11.4688; df. = 1; $p < .001$). Results indicated that females rated other females as being more socially competent than males. Such feelings, moreover, were more strongly held regarding males than females. Classification results, however, demonstrated that only 50.3% of the cases were correctly classified. These results were not statistically significant. (See Tables 6 and 7.)

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Insert Tables 6 and 7 about here

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The second analysis was statistically significant (Chi-square = 44.6635; df. = 1, $p < .001$). Results indicated that males also rated females as being more socially competent than other males. Classification results, moreover, were statistically significant and demonstrated that 60.1% of the

cases were correctly classified. (See Tables 8 and 9.)

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Insert Tables 8 and 9 about here

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Additional procedures were also noteworthy. In further but similar analyses, when task, group composition, and group size were considered concomitantly with gender distinctions, results did not prove statistically significant. Evidently, the people participating in the group discussions, rather than the structure of the situation, seemed to play a more important role in individual perceptions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study are open to several interpretations since some analyses were statistically significant while others were not. The discussion has three foci: results regarding group structure, results regarding reactions to group members, and further comments regarding role theory.

Gender and Group Climate

Results might offer support for Strodtbeck and Mann's (1956) role differentiation, viewing men as task-oriented and women as socio-emotive people. Recall men thought that groups had little task-cohesiveness, members had relatively equal influence, and that members were not particularly personable. Such perceptions seem to be congruent with task-oriented male roles. First, men might feel that there was little concern for the task at hand since the group was together for only one hour. Second, since traditional male roles reflect a prominently male influence in

decision-making processes, males might naturally feel that power was shared. Traditionally they have the power; therefore, nothing was perceived as different here. Third, since task-oriented behavior is often assumed as superordinate to socio-emotive behavior, if male interests are with tasks, socio-emotive behavior would seemingly be perceived as subordinate.

Female responses might be viewed in a different, though complementary, respect. Recall women perceived groups exhibited task-cohesiveness, power was unequally distributed, and that people were generally personable. Such perceptions, again, seem to be congruent with socio-emotive female roles. First, since traditional female roles give less emphasis to task-oriented behavior, any such behavior might be noticed by women. Second, women typically have shared unequally in the amount of influence allowed in decision-making processes. That women should perceive a discrepancy here is not untenable. Third, females have traditionally been viewed as the socializers. Female perceptions of others as friendly and personable would not seem unreasonable.

Another interpretation would also provide support for role differentaitions such as those suggested by Barnlund (1952). Following Strodtbeck and Mann's (1956) role distinctions, one might argue that men are less socially-oriented than women. Such a position would account for men not perceiving some of the previously mentioned behavior. Men did not notice these differences since they have been unaccustomed to notice such phenomena. Women, however, did perceive differences since they are more socially attuned. While this interpretation attributes greater sensi tivity to women than to men, traditional role differentiations are still suggested..

Gender and Perceived Social Competence

Were it not for part two of the study, results might appear rather straightforward. A question arises: if perceptions regarding group climate were differentiated as a function of traditional roles, why were not perceptions regarding individuals within that group differentiated in such respects?

Several answers seem plausible. Although situational variables--such as task, group composition, and group size--did not surface as significant differentiators regarding an individual's perceptions, perhaps in a more holistic sense, people do make such distinctions. Jordan and McLaughlin (1976), for example, argue that persons will be perceived primarily on the basis of traditional sex roles in an ambiguous role situation. Since group climate might reflect an ambiguous role structure, that individuals relied upon traditional stereotypes would support Jordan and McLaughlin's assertion. These results also support contentions (Yearby, 1972; Mabry, 1976a) that situational dimensions should be studied.

As Kay Deaux points out, however, truth is not necessarily so simple. While the choices men and women make in different situations may vary, the stereotyped view that men are this way and women are that way is less reliable (Deaux, 1976). Interestingly, traditional role differentiations appeared when people considered the group climate but not when they considered other individuals directly. Expectations based upon traditional roles, in fact, were completely reversed. Women were seen by both sexes as more competent than the men. Men, conversely, were viewed by both sexes as less competent than the women. Evidently, when the variables in question are less ambiguous than Jordan and McLaughlin describe,

traditional sex role assignment breaks down.

Besides situation-specific variables confounding studies on gender differences, differences between the sexes may also be greater among certain subgroups of men and women than among others (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974). Discussing the concept of androgyny, in fact, Raven and Rubin (1976, 122-123) cite several studies which suggest stereotyping individuals into specific sex roles may become increasingly less appropriate. Remember that while the first discriminant analysis was statistically significant the accompanying classification analysis was not. In addition, subjects in the study were undergraduate students and, hence, they are typically young. Perhaps contemporary generations adhere less closely to traditional role expectations, particularly when people are considering specific individuals.

While future research ought to continue examining potential differences in one's communication as a function of sex, two suggestions are offered. Examining sex differences from a multivariate analytic perspective is needed. Limited research scope may provide insufficient evidence for making assertions about one's communication. Second, variables like androgyny should be fully explored, or controlled, in the study of gender differences.

Footnotes

1. Data collection procedures discussed in this section reflect only part of a larger research project currently in progress.

2. The Group Description Form was originally developed by Mabry (1976a). While he used an oblique rotation (with the Scree limitation), the current analysis used an orthogonal rotation. Results were comparable in that the analyses yielded similar interpretations. The orthogonal analysis is retained in this report.

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APPENDIX A

Items Retained From Group Description Form

Item	Statements
01[b]	Most of what the group accomplished was due to the work of a couple of members.
02[b]	The group has been controlled by the actions of a couple of its members.
03[d]	Failure of the group would mean little to individual members.
04[c]	Aspects of each member's personal lives became known to other members of the group.
05[b]	Certain members had more influence on the group than others.
06[c]	A member had the chance to get to know all other members of the group.
07[a]	Members of the group seemed to work together as a team.
08[a]	There was a high degree of participation in the group.
09[a]	There was an undercurrent of feelings among the members that seemed to pull the group apart.
10[c]	There were frequent intervals of laughter during the group meeting.
11[d]	Failure of the group would mean nothing to most members.
12[a]	The group seemed to share its task responsibility evenly.

a: Task-cohesiveness; b: Power; c: Personalness; d: Involvement.

TABLE 1

ROTATED FACTOR MATRIX FOR GROUP CLIMATE

(N = 354)

Item Number**	Factor I: Task-Cohesiveness	II: Power	III: Personalness	IV: Involvement
01	.11248	.72517*	.21096	-.06716
02	.08478	.78155*	.08231	.05520
03	.03126	.03492	.08922	.73987*
04	-.01537	.04859	.61724*	.06381
05	-.06873	-.58593*	-.01488	-.13332
06	.24619	.11502	.46144*	.21563
07	.75478*	.04224	.11509	.08385
08	.62337*	.15833	.25134	.07569
09	.67378*	.00774	.08403	.08267
10	.17281	.10420	.57641*	.04344
11	.22465	.08077	.09299	.77078*
12	.66150*	.32936	.13076	.11088

*Items loading on this factor

**Appendix A contains an enumeration of these items.

TABLE 2

VARIANCE ASSOCIATED WITH GROUP CLIMATE FACTORS

Factor	Reliability Coefficient*	Eigenvalue	Percent of Variance
1	.77	4.3928	37.5
2	.37	1.8652	15.9
3	.44	1.6971	14.5
4	.78	1.1867	10.1
			78.0

*Split-half correlation coefficients corrected with the spearman-Brown prophecy formula; $p < .001$.

TABLE 3

DISCRIMINANT ANALYSIS: MALES AND FEMALES/GROUP CLIMATE

Eigenvalue	Canonical Correlation	Wilk's Lambda	Chi-Square	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
.07021	.25614	.93439	23.68277	4	.001

	Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients	
Parameter	35 (Task-Cohesiveness)	-.59645
	36 (Power)	-.47068
	37 (Personalness)	-.44690
	38 (Involvement)	.12286

Centroids in reduced space: GRP 1 (Females) = -.23168, GRP 2(Males) = .30134; N = 354

TABLE 4

CLASSIFICATION ANALYSIS: MALES AND FEMALES/GROUP CLIMATE

Actual Group	Predicted Group Membership	
	1 (Females)	2 (Males)
1 (Females)	66.3%	33.7%
2 (Males)	40.5%	59.5%

63.4% of known cases correctly classified; Chi-square = 25.102, $p < .001$

TABLE 5

ROTATED FACTOR MATRIX FOR REACTIONS TO GROUP MEMBERS

(N = 354)

Item Number	Factor I:** Competence	Scale Description
01	.59995*	Diplomatic - Undiplomatic
02	.72629*	Industrious - Lazy
03	.77046*	Intelligent - Unintelligent
04	.09444	Forceful - Nonassertive
05	.78944*	Has Realistic Ideas - Has Unrealistic Ideas
06	.56154	Easy Going - Drives Self
07	.89119*	Uses Good Judgment - Uses Poor Judgment
Eigenvalue	4.3587	
Percent of Variance	83.0	

*Items loading on this factor

**Correlation coefficient corrected with Spearman-Brown formula provided reliability estimate of .80.

TABLE 6

DISCRIMINANT ANALYSIS: FEMALES' REACTION TO GROUP MEMBERS

Eigenvalue	Canonical Correlation	Wilk's Lambda	Chi-Square	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
.06010	.23811	.94331	11.46882	1	.001

	Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficient
Variable 71 (Competence)	5.75230

Centroids in reduced space: GRP 1(Females) = .14763, GRP 2 (Males) = -.26040; N = 354

TABLE 7

CLASSIFICATION ANALYSIS: FEMALES' REACTION TO GROUP MEMBERS

Actual Group	Predicted Group Membership	
	1 (Females)	2 (Males)
1 (Females)	52.8%	47.2%
2 (Males)	54.2%	45.8%

50.3% of known cases correctly classified; Chi-square = .005; N.S.

TABLE 8

DISCRIMINANT ANALYSIS: MALES' REACTION TO GROUP MEMBERS

Eigenvalue	Canonical Correlation	Wilk's Lambda	Chi-Square	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
.34550	.50674	.74322	44.66354	1	.001

	Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficient
Variable 71 (Competence)	6.08798

Centroids in reduced space: GRP 1 (Females) = .52680, GRP 2 (Males) = -.38911; N = 354

TABLE 9

CLASSIFICATION ANALYSIS: MALES' REACTION TO GROUP MEMBERS

Actual Group	Predicted Group Membership	
	1 (Females)	2 (Males)
1 (Females)	70.8%	29.2%
2 (Males)	47.7%	52.3%

60.1% of known cases correctly classified; Chi-square = 6.281; $p < .01$.